

JUNE 6, 1974

Every morning going to the ranch, I listen to an old boy on the radio, giving the market report. Each day, the cow depression sounds worse. "Steady with last week's decline" is about as close as the news ever comes to being good.

Cattle here at the ranch have not adjusted to the market failure. The sack broke old sisters must think that the Salvation Army is underwriting our expenses. Slick black mothers go trailing after the pickup as if they thought they still deserved a handout. Many more weeks of failing prices and they'll think handout. I've already cut the saddle horses down to a coffee can of oats per head.

All last week, we sprayed the cattle for horn flies. After studying the invoice on the insecticide, I told my second man to try to drown as many flies as he could with straight water. Horn flies don't hurt near as much on today's market as they did last summer on boom prices. What hide and hair the flies bite off on a 20 some odd cent a pound cow won't matter in the fall. The old sisters can learn to use their tails for a swatter; we still have plenty of dirt tanks that they can wade into.

Also included in last week's dreary market news was a note that the consumer chiefs claim they aren't through fussing about beef prices. Consumers, I've decided, must be suffering from cases of ingrowing toenails so severe that they have lost track of values. Number one trash beans are outselling chuck roasts. One can of fly spray is apt to cost more than a whole package of hamburger.

I got to thinking that maybe I could help by writing an open message to the consumer leaders. On a first draft it'd be like this:

Dear consumer or Consumeress:

From what we hear in the Shortgrass Country, you are still dissatisfied about the retail price of hamburger. We need to get together and discuss your dissatisfaction as many of us are going to be a bit dissatisfied when the Red Cross has to move out here to feed all the broke herders and feeders that are going to have to be fed next winter.

What I mean is that it's all right with us if you go on and start another boycott, but keep in mind that you are too late to do us any more harm. Only one outfit that I know of that has any threat over the domestic cow business in the United States. We are going to be in bad trouble if the Atomic Energy Commission gets interested in using feedlots or ranches for targets without notifying us in advance. Otherwise don't worry about anyone or anything that can add to the wreck that's already completed.

Another thing you need to understand is that we aren't bitter about the boycott last summer. Cow people don't hold grudges. We like to josh about how funny it'd be if some of our enemies had to spend a year in a Russian hospital, recovering from puncture wound caused by a rusty nail. But that's the same kind of teasing that the sheep herders use when they go around joking about how funny it'd be for the coyote lovers to catch rabies during a vaccine shortage. You just have to remember that humor is spawned by hardship and that hardship, it seems, is an item that we are going to have a big surplus of.

So if you feel like marching or picketing against red meat, go ahead and get started. Do consider wearing tennis shoes instead of your leather ones. I know that rubber

picks up nails worse than leather, but it may be a long time before enough cow hide is produced to make anything else but tennis shoes.

You may not think so now, but you'll miss us when we are gone.

With limited regards,

Monte

Of course I'm not going to mail a letter to any of those city bred hotheads.

Summer days are too hot for letter writing, the nights too cool and beautiful to be spoiled.

I really admire the boys who can stand this calamity. It's going to take some tough hides, good bankers, and loyal wives to make it through. Did you ever see anything that could end as swift as a cow boom?